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ABSTRACT

It is important to teach students the ways in which rhetorical and literary texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. It is equally important, however, for teachers of writing, primarily members of English departments, to acknowledge the production and consumption processes of texts external to the genres of the academy and to recognize that the essay is a printed form that, admittedly for students, has little use outside the academy. For one author/educator, recognizing text outside of academic genres has led to the production of an electronic portfolio. This paper focuses on the electronic portfolio, suggesting that it offers a gateway between popular culture and composition pedagogy. In the paper, the author/educator opines that compiling an electronic portfolio has allowed his students to reach beyond the expository or argumentative essay as they engage new rhetorical strategies and new conceptions of authorship, readership, and "appropriate" uses of technology within (and without) the space of a classroom. According to the paper, of greatest value in the completion of an electronic portfolio is the act of personal reflection on the electronic writing process which allows both teachers and students to consider new and exciting communication paradigms. The paper addresses two primary areas: logic behind classroom recognition of electronic literacy and popular culture, and pedagogical implications as they relate to assessment and student performance. Cites 19 works. (NKA)

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Private Literacies in Academic Settings: The Electronic Portfolio as Prototype

By Joe Wilferth

In *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*, Richard Lanham suggests that perhaps those most resistant to the "digital revolution" are members of English departments, those who are often divided between what does and what does not constitute a text. Often at the heart of this debate is the privileging of one literacy paradigm, that of print, and the marginalizing of another, primarily that devoted to the production of electronic discourse. To further complicate the issue, even when we do recognize electronic models of literacy, we tend to shape our experience, as Johnson-Eilola has so eloquently pointed out, through our nostalgia for earlier models of literacy, again, those focused on print and the printed page. It is no doubt important to teach students the ways in which rhetorical and literary texts are produced, distributed, and consumed; however, it is equally important for teachers of writing, primarily members of English departments, to acknowledge the production and consumption processes of texts external to the genres of the academy and to recognize that the essay is a printed form that admittedly for our students has little use outside the academy.

Myron Tuman suggests "the unadorned text which has been practically the sole concern of language educators the last hundred years has also been increasingly on the periphery of all other forms of communications" (110). It seems that the collective English department and her subsequent writing classrooms tend to resist changes while

peripheral acts of communication, often those taking place in and around popular culture, increasingly take place in computer-mediated environments. Emphasizing this point, Tuman asks, "How...are we to explain the fact that while we have come to rely more heavily on pictures – at first still but now moving, even pulsating – literacy education has remained fixated on the unadorned, printed text as the embodiment of new experiences?" (110). I don't claim to answer Tuman's question in what follows; instead, I support his query and argue here for these peripheral acts of communication – namely the text of an electronic portfolio – as valuable, "legitimate," and intellectually rigorous exercises. Specifically, I shall argue that because our students are often well-armed with technological proficiency – occasionally more so than educators – and because they primarily have experience with *reading* electronic or online text, we, as teachers, may find it useful to tap into these "private literacies," those acquired in and through popular culture, as we push our students to think critically about *writing* (text production) and issues of audience and readership (text consumption).

For this writing teacher, recognizing text outside of academic genres has led to the production of an electronic portfolio. How so? Interest in popular culture and the place of popular culture in the classroom necessarily calls for critical thinking along such lines. For example, we might consider how popular culture and technology intersect. Such is the nature of this special issue. As teachers, we might consider how those intersections manifest themselves in the writing classroom. Again, such is the query of this special issue. As a rationale for the focus of what follows, I suggest here that the electronic portfolio offers a gateway between popular culture and composition pedagogy. That is, primarily through the act of reflecting upon one's increasing literacy (one key component

of the electronic portfolio) and by contributing to popular culture via web publication, the electronic portfolio offers a doorway whereupon students move from the Web, clearly a feature of mass/popular culture, to the classroom and back again.

Reflecting on my own experience in the process of authoring an electronic portfolio and taking such reflection into praxis, into the writing classroom as students too compiled electronic portfolios, has allowed my students to reach beyond the expository or argumentative essay as they engage new rhetorical strategies and new conceptions of authorship, readership, and "appropriate" uses of technology within (and without) the space of a classroom. Of greatest value in the completion of such a portfolio, the act of reflecting on one's electronic writing process allows both teachers and students to consider new and exciting communication paradigms.

The goal then is this: considering Tuman's description of the essay as "unadorned text," an essay which operates on the periphery of "all other forms of communication," this project addresses the possibility of rejoining the writing community via popular culture and the electronic portfolio. I suggest here that this may be accomplished if/when we finally stop reveling in those unadorned, peripheral texts by subscribing to electronic discourse and the electronic portfolio in college composition classrooms. Stressed in this project is the fact that by recognizing the need for altered definitions of literacy in the electronic writing classroom, we increase the understanding and importance of writing in our students' lives as well as our own scholarly lives.

In doing so, I shall address two primary areas: logic behind classroom recognition of electronic literacy and popular culture,and pedagogical implications as they relate to assessment and student performance.

Private Literacies, Popular Culture, and Going Public

Favoring an electronic model which features online authorship in course curriculum, Steve Watkins describes "authentic writing" students practice and produce in the electronic classroom. For Watkins, the work produced by students in the "traditional" composition course has no real audience other than the teacher and the author's peers. A student's work, in a metaphorical sense, dies at the classroom door. At the same time, authors in the traditional classroom may have difficulty invoking a particular audience. That is, conjuring Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," Watkins reflects the need for students to "fictionalize" an audience. Just as Ede and Lunsford have argued that a writer must be able to invoke or fictionalize his/her audience in a traditional composition classroom – along similar lines to Walter Ong's "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction" – Watkins argues that the author of electronic text must also fictionalize his/her audience. In fact, Watkins suggests that such an act is easier to achieve in the computer-mediated or computer-enhanced classroom as students may feel they are producing work for a more concrete audience. That is, the audience ironically becomes more tangible (e.g., the student's mother or father in their respective work environment, friends who have web access) and less abstract, less fictionalized.

Of greatest significance here is the fact that the audience of online writing is much larger than that which is made up of classroom peers and the teacher. Students may envision, as they did in a recent Professional and Technical Writing course, future employers as users of the portfolio, as audience members who may find such a portfolio

valuable in determining a potential employee's technological proficiency and/or ability to acquire new skills and to take on new tasks. Students also have an opportunity to reflect on their composing processes in what may be a new medium. (Electronic portfolios excerpted here are with permission from the students.) For this reason, Watkins identifies the work produced as authentic writing or "writing composed primarily for an actual audience (in addition to the evaluator) and composed with the functional purpose of materially affecting that audience" (222). Continuing his discussion of authentic writing, Watkins states, "Although I don't believe that a strict real-world/not-real-world dichotomy exists between writing assignments, I do believe that certain writing may be oriented toward an actual primary audience and that such writing may have real material effects in relation to the writing assignment's content and its intended audience" (222).

Using Watkins views on the audience of electronic writing and the ways in which the author of electronic text might shape discourse (such that it becomes "authentic"), one could certainly argue that a larger audience does make the writing more "real" for students. This is certainly a benefit in terms of text accessibility. At the same time, however, one could argue in line with Peter Elbow's "Closing My Eyes As I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience" that this audience awareness might simply block the production of text. Arguing in favor of "reader-based prose" during particular stages of the writing process, as a reaction to the negative potentials of a teacher's struggling to eliminate what Linda Flower has identified as "writer-based prose," Elbow states, "[W]e need... the ability to turn off audience awareness – especially when it confuses thinking or blocks discourse" (56). Indeed, this is true. Audience awareness may simply hinder our students' writing processes. Adding computer technology to that awareness – the fact

that the students' writing is now available for the whole world to see – could simply exacerbate problems. The audience may be too real and the writing too authentic. In Ede and Lunsford's terms, the "audience addressed" may be more intimidating in this computer-mediated environment especially as electronic authors compose in metaphorical darkness.

In her "Student Hypertexts: The Perils and Promises of Paths Not Taken," Emily Golson addresses such audience-related issues as she explains that our students must be willing to take risks in a new and awkward mode of writing. The contributing factor to this awkwardness is rooted in audience. According to Golson,

> The associative nature of hypertext suggests modified support for Ede and Lunsford's theory, for in hypertext, multiple addressed/invoked audiences reformulate and transform themselves with the push of every button. Every link has the potential to suggest reconsiderations of a prior configuration that, in turn, may suggest reconsideration of a prior configuration, and so on. The very rapidity of this transformation, however, may contribute to novice hypertext writers' inability to sustain addressed/invoked audiences as this construction of varied pathways forces a writer to consider diverging rather than converging notions of audience. (296)

At the heart of Golson's comments is the fact that hyper-text is unstable text. Whereas printed, hardcopy text is stable in its linearity and in its direct line to authorial intent in terms of organization, introduction, conclusion, and so on, the electronic text disrupts linearity. The nonlinearity of hypertext, then, causes the author and the reader to constantly reinvent him/herself with every linked node. Considering such intersections

between electronic writing and audience (or authorship and readership) surely helps us to avoid Selfe and Hawisher's "rhetoric of technology" as computer technologies problematize such areas.

Along similar lines, though not specifically concerned with electronic discourse or intersections of computer technology and composition pedagogy, Richard Courage is concerned with public and private literacies (or school and nonschool-based literacies). In his "The Interaction of Public and Private Literacies," Courage conjures David Bartholomae's use of the term "public life" as it relates to societal and communal interaction. The "private," for Courage, evokes intimacy most often found in the home, among family, and among friends. Taking the liberty to extend Courage's dichotomy and to apply it to my discussion of computer technology, composition pedagogy, and popular culture, I would argue that electronic writing blurs the lines between public and private literacy. That is, I would argue that the dichotomy between public and private or academic and nonacademic-based literacies need not be so prevalent in the electronic medium. Students might benefit from a hybrid form of writing which blends their private reading (e.g. comic books, popular magazines, and favorite websites) with a school related assignment. In the end, students might produce works that are not clearly "academic" or "private" as they acquire new literacy skills along the way. Certainly, the mixing of public and private literacies may be beneficial to our students; however, it would be naive not to acknowledge the possibility that this hybridization may work against our attempts to foster student learning. Continually, it seems, we must be conscious of the rhetoric of technology in our attempts to maintain critical awareness as teachers blending theory and practice into our pedagogy.

Finally, relating to my original question concerning the need to look toward an electronic literacy model as we engage our students' private literacies, perhaps William Costanzo says it best in his "Reading, Writing, and Thinking in an Age of Electronic Literacy": "[C]omputers are altering the way many of us read, write, and even think. It is not simply that the tools of literacy have changed; the nature of texts, of language, of literacy itself is undergoing crucial transformations" (11). Indeed, we do read and write differently in and with computer technology. We do not, as so many have pointed out, write better at the computer. Our writing processes are simply different. We engage a new literacy model that challenges our previously acquired – and even mastered – literacy models. This seems to be the case, as Costanzo points out, as a result of the shifting nature of text.

Echoing Costanzo's comments on the shifting nature of the text, Gary Heba, in his "HyperRhetoric: Multimedia, Literacy, and the Future of Composition," explicates multimedia literacy as he says of the new reading:

> [B]ecause of radical changes in the nature and forms of hypermedia and multimedia information, literacy cannot be thought of as centered in any one medium. Each medium has its own literacy, and when existing media are combined in new ways, this creates something else entirely – a multiple-medium literacy. Language, in the form of digitized bits of text, images, and sounds, is now dispersed in small information fragments across all available media, and accessing information becomes much more like channel surfing than reading. (22)

Although Heba articulates a multimedia literacy specifically, his argument surely carries over into hypertext literacy as one could argue that both models exist under the umbrella

of a more general electronic literacy. Indeed, George Landow finds little to distinguish hypertext from other more dynamic media as these forms so often blur into one another as various components of one text. Transcending definitions of hypertext or hypermedia as very different models, then, is the definition of electronic literacy, a model which includes various forms of hyper-texts.

Pedagogical Implications: Evaluating Hypertext Writing and the Electronic Portfolio

Just as new composing practices are engaged, refined, and re-defined in the writing classroom that promotes learning through computer technology, so too are pedagogical practices such as evaluation in need of refinement and redefinition. After all, if students are now engaging inclusive practices as online writing and new addressed/invoked audiences such that their work becomes authentic as they simultaneously engage new and often unfamiliar computer technology, then does it not make sense to consider such problematic areas of evaluation? Or more simply stated, as instructional and composing practice changes, doesn't it make sense that evaluation practices must reflect such changes as well?

For Andrea Herrmann, "Evaluations can no longer focus solely on written products using traditional criteria. Teachers [of electronic text] need diagnostic information telling them whether students are mastering what is being taught." At the same time, "students deserve grades that reflect the entirety of the teaching/learning situation, including changes in students' writing processes and written products as a

result of using computer technology" (163). Herrmann's argument falls in line with Johndan Johnson-Eilola's argument (1997) that hypertext must be rearticulated to the point that it is free from the nostalgia of print and print conventions. Writing teachers, then, cannot simply apply traditional rubrics, those designed for the evaluation of print, to hypertext as new composing practices and new rhetorical strategies are engaged in such a medium.

New evaluation practices, according to Herrmann, might consist of two approaches. First, writing teachers providing instruction in computer-enhanced learning environments might assign ungraded, process-based exercises during the course of a semester that attempt to assess student mastery of the technology. Such exercises should move from the rather simple to the more complex. Providing the pedagogical rationale behind such an evaluation practice, Herrmann suggests that such exercises "provide an impetus with a deadline for students to acquire the technological skill" while simultaneously underscoring the importance of learning the technology. This approach also provides teachers "with diagnostic information, making it possible to provide students with individual instruction as needed" (163). Specific skills to be measured at this stage in the electronic composing process may include the student's ability to add graphics, to hierarchically arrange the text, to revise and to publish work.

A second approach to evaluation might be in the form of the end-of-term electronic portfolio. Such a portfolio acts as a barometer of sorts which gages both product and process. Students, as a result, are evaluated at the end of the semester on their newly acquired electronic literacy. Certainly an important part of such a portfolio,

as Watkins has demonstrated, reflection on the part of the student/author/developer may contribute to the evaluation process.

Recognizing the "radical newness" of hypertext writing, Kristine Blair and Pamela Takayoshi have explicated the evaluation of electronic texts in light of such novelty. Specifically, Blair and Takayoshi comment on their experience with a student named Patti (a pseudonym) saying: "[W]e became more than mere graders of the work; we became actual users of the work, a real-life audience interacting with the document. Our standards for grading had to shift not only to account for the expanded capabilities of this medium but also to account for its different conceptual requirements" (364). Discussing the evaluation of one student's electronic portfolio, these authors explain that they found a rather linear text. According to Blair and Takayoshi, "In Patti's portfolio, users move throughout the document unidirectionally in an order set by Patti. The author in this case never relinquishes control of the user's ability to access information, nor does she allow for a multidimensional, multilinear reading" (362). The flatness of electronic text, arguably the result of an adherence to conventions and constraints of a print medium, limits a model of reading that is possible in hypertext. The flatness of text in an electronic model of writing arguably represents an electronic version of Linda Flower's "writer-based prose" as novice writers, it seems, "create maps that support functional rather than figurative navigation through the text, thus promoting momentary linearity rather than generating varied reconfigurations of meaning" (Golson 296). Such texts, for Blair and Takayoshi, are "glorified versions of the hard copy text" (363) as they restrict the reader from achieving a potential practice of text production that cannot be found in print.

How does flatness or linearity in hypertext writing then play out in text evaluation? Certainly, an awareness of authorial intentions must be considered. As Davida Charney suggests that hypertext may be written in a way that promotes "insights and critical thinking through the creative juxtaposition of ideas from multiple perspectives" (259). Students may clearly intend for readers to have such experiences during the reading process. On the other hand, hypertext might also "reduce itself to a guessing game, as the user figures out what the hypertext writer (usually the teacher or another student) had in mind when creating a link" (259).

Attempting to avoid such guesswork on the part of evaluators of student hypertexts, writing teachers might include in evaluation rubrics a category relating to authorial intent. Reflecting on their own writing processes, then, student-authors have an opportunity to provide input into the evaluation of their work while they also make connections between developing electronic genres, developing conventions of those genres, the purpose of the hypertext, as well as the audience of the hypertext. Based on such reflection, teacher-evaluators may better determine the effectiveness of the writing.

Additionally, Andrea Herrmann suggests that teachers evaluate two other features of student hypertexts along with effectiveness and relations to audience, purpose, and content. Herrmann recommends that teachers might evaluate based on the student's expertise using the technology or how well-crafted the text is, and she suggests that teachers evaluate based on the student's ability to integrate the writing with the technology to create a successful written product (164). This last approach to evaluation specifically addresses how effectively visual features are incorporated into the text.

Conclusion

As Charney has pointed out, teachers and students belonging to a literate society are familiar with traditional textual practices and structures. "We have time-tested cognitive and rhetorical theories to bring to bear on describing effective printed texts, and we have derived from these theories a wealth of practical advice to convey to writers.... But we lack corresponding theories for how to deal with hypertexts – especially those that push the limits with complex linkages within and between a complex set of texts" (260). I have attempted to shed light on hypertext theory and practice to the extent that new cognitive and rhetorical practices might be better understood as they apply to the construction of an electronic portfolio. The compiling of the electronic portfolio and the inclusion of computer technology in the writing classroom requires risks. These risks involve a sort of bravery on the part of teachers and students alike – bravery that allows the private literacies of popular culture to be fused with academic literacies. Certainly, both teachers and students alike frequently find hypertext and new conversations surrounding the production of and the evaluation of text frightening. For as Golson reminds us,

> Students take great risks when writing in hypertext, hoping for great rewards. If we are to guide them in their efforts, we must also take risks. By emphasizing the exploration of unintentional meanings, encouraging the invention of metaphor, exposing our own and our students' perceptual weaknesses, and not only invoking but perhaps even imposing ourselves as audiences for our students, we can continue to further our students' realization of the potential of hypertext. (307)

Along similar lines, Cynthia Selfe has reminded us in her "Redefining Literacy: The Multi-layered Grammars of Computers" that the conventions of the page and the

conventions of the screen require two different literacies. Whereas one of these literacies -- print – is known by teachers and often mastered by students, the other literacy that has been conjured by the marriage of computer technology and composition pedagogy is lesser-known and less-often mastered by both teachers and students.

Such a literacy strikes fear in the hearts of teachers seeking to maintain control of the classroom as it promotes a more student-centered pedagogy, one in which teacher-student and student-student relationships are reconfigured and reconstructed. Reconstructing such relationships raises more questions than answers according to Henrietta Nickels Shirk in "Hypertext and Composition Studies." Teachers of writing, as a result, must confront new pedagogical concerns: How involved do we want the computer to be in pedagogy and in the learning process? Do we distinguish between text that promotes and reinforces the conventions of print, or do we value text that sheds light on new conventions in writing practice? What kinds of learning situations best lend themselves to various models of text production? Do we develop new standards for evaluation given the differing natures of two distinct models of literacy? Ultimately, we might also consider the extent to which computer technology in the classroom carries implications for distributions of knowledge, power, and accessibility. Such concerns invariably impact ideology – or should impact ideology as Andrea Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James Slevin (1990) have argued – as we negotiate evolving relationships between technology, popular culture, and the writing classroom.

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